

Living in the Past

Historical perspective



The most dangerous of all Allied spies

Ever since [Virginia Hall](#) was a young girl, everybody around her knew she was different, and rejected her and belittled her. Virginia was rebellious, admittedly cantankerous, and always looking for adventure. She liked to hunt. She arrived at her Maryland school one day wearing a bracelet made of live snakes. She refused to get married into the same privileged circle in which she grew up.

Virginia wanted to become an ambassador, and went to college to pursue her dream. But, the 1930s was not a popular time for women to fill traditionally men's roles such as a national representative. So, she landed a clerical job at the US Consulate in Turkey. While hunting, she accidentally shot herself in the foot. Eventually, gangrene set in, and her left leg was amputated below the knee. This injury proved to be a turning point in Virginia's life, strengthening her resolve to make a huge difference and "to do great things."



When World War II broke out, and Germany invaded France, Virginia volunteered to drive an ambulance for the French. France was soon overrun, forcing her to flee to Britain. A chance meeting with a spy put her in contact with British intelligence. In 1941, after some limited training, Virginia became one of the first spies sent by Britain into Nazi-occupied France, posing as a reporter for the *New York Post*. She broke new ground on many espionage activities, pioneering the ability to stay one step ahead of the Gestapo, the German Secret Police.

After communication training in Morse code by British Special Operations, Virginia used her skills to send numerous messages from within Nazi territory for troop whereabouts, overheard plans, and organizing of rescues. At one point in 1942, she organized a jailbreak of a large number of French prisoners. Most Germans who knew her personally called her "The Limping Lady," while the infuriated Gestapo responded with a large manhunt, calling Virginia "the most dangerous of all Allied spies."

She became a master of Morse code communication, calling in many air-drops for the Resistance, who blew up bridges, sabotaged trains, and reclaimed villages ahead of the Allied advance.

After the War, in 1947, Virginia joined the CIA, one of the first women to do so. She was the only civilian woman ever to be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. You can read more about her in [NPR](#), [Glinda](#), and [ABC](#). There have also been several books and two movies that honor Virginia Hall.



Painting of Virginia at her key



Being awarded the Distinguished Service Cross